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Passport to Privilege: English for Survival in Pakistan

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Passport to Privilege: English is Needed for Survival in Pakistan

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This paper has explored participants' views about the role of English in education in Pakistan. The symbolic power of language (Bourdieu, 1991) and theories about the globalization of English including linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992), world Englishes (Kachru, 1990), and the sociolinguistics of English (Blommaert, 2010) are used as theoretical framework. The study employed a qualitative design strategy, a phenomenological case study, in order to understand how participants understood the role of English in education. The study explored students, teachers, and administrators' perceptions in different school systems about the importance of the English language for students' academic, professional, and social life in Pakistan.

Using constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) as an analytical tool, the study found that participants in different schools belonging to different SES believe that English is the most important language and a necessary element for survival in academic, professional, and social life in Pakistan. Those students who are competent in English have more opportunities to gain admission into and adjust to the academic environment. Being the official language, English is also a prerequisite for most of the professional jobs. It also helps an individual to adjust to English-dominated professional environment. Therefore, English is considered a symbol of social status,

intelligence, and good education in Pakistan. However, local languages are considered necessary for communication in for everyday purposes. The results of this study showed that competence in English is necessary for survival in Pakistan, but it is not proving a threat to local languages since they have their role in social life.

Author

The author was born in Buner Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. He graduated with a Master in English and Master in education. He completed his doctoral studies at the University of Rochester NY. He pursued his research in access to English language in education in Pakistan and is teaching English in a college in Pakistan.